25-02-1992 11:00 DE 41 22 7330826 P/ C.I.D.R.C. PAG.02

TL 4913

east timor news agency
agência de notícias de timor leste
ETNA

Robert Davis
editor

AUSTRALIAN DIPLOMATS LOSE THEIR COOL

Geneva, 24 February (ETNA) - Australian diplomats seem to be losing their cool. Ambassador Walker and his deputy, the ever charismatic and energetic Bill Barker, seem to be outmanouvered by the Portuguese every step of the way.

While Walker and Barker were hoping to have a mild alternative resolution on East Timor tabled before the European Community's draft resolution could be tabled, the Portuguese delegation anticipated their move and outmanouvered the Australians. The Australians seemed incensed and accused the Portuguese of being "discourteous". Some terse exchanges of words were overheard between the Australian and Portuguese delegations.

José Luis Guterres, Fretilin Representative to the United Nations in New York, who with José Ramos-Horta is lobbying at the Commission, said with a mixture of anger and bewilderment at the Australian behaviour: "of course I would understand that Australia would be very active if it were to be the target of a resolution, let's say, dealing with aboriginal deaths in custody. However, this draft has nothing to do with Australia, so it really confirms that the Australians are once again too eager to court favours with Indonesia. Why else would Bill Barker go around lobbying against this draft?"

There is a growing and widespread unhappiness among human rights activists over this behaviour which is seen by many as inconsistent with Australia's claim to stand for human rights irrespective of the regime involved. As one African human rights activist put it: "I thought Australia would be like Sweden, but having learned of its behaviour towards East Timor, Indonesia and Bougainville, not to mention its abhorent treatment of Australian aborigines, we are beginning to perceive that Australia is one of the more cynical delegations in this Commission."

end.

head office and asia-pacific bureau
mailing address: po box 624 newport beach nsw 2106 australia telephone: (+612) 973 1706 fax: (+612) 973 1706